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campus commentary



Volume 14

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No. 2

Dear Brother:

It was exactly 1:25 p.m. CST on Friday, November 22, when the news hit the campus: "President Kennedy is dead." Professors closed their books, and students filed dazedly out of classrooms. Death was only a vague word to many of them — and this was the first time it had come to one whom every one of them knew.

I shall never forget what happened then. Within twenty minutes the University Chapel was crowded with three thousand students and instructors. Some sat quietly, staring at the cross above the pulpit. Others knelt on the cold floor. The only sound was an occasional sob. The organ began to play and I read the only words that could matter at that moment: "I am the Resurrection and the Life" . . . "Now is Christ risen from the dead" . . . "Let not your heart be troubled" . . . "In my Father's house are many mansions" . . . "Unto Almighty God we commend the soul of John Fitzgerald Kennedy" . . . We sang a few hymns and resolved to have a memorial service four hours later. Soundlessly the students left the chapel. For a moment there was a brief ray of sunlight between the November clouds.

By the way, several brethren wrote to me during the next few days pointing out that the assassination of President Kennedy had been felt with particular emotional shock by the younger generation. A few weeks later I saw a letter from a professor at Williams College. He wrote: "Not too long ago the present younger generation was labeled 'the beat' — 'the silent' — 'the unconcerned'. Its most obvious characteristic seemed to be nonchalance and individualistic rebellion. But I saw this generation weep over the death by assassination of the President of the United States. I suspect that their declaration of grief was of more than passing significance — the picture of a boy in tears on the steps of the Harvard chapel; distraught students in the Williams chapel; children crying in secondary schools; others strewing flowers along a street in Dallas . . . The unconcerned debate Berlin, Viet Nam and Birmingham; the silent ones weep openly."

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Perhaps this is a good place to refer briefly to a remarkable article "Life and Preaching" by the great German bishop Otto Dibelius. It appeared in **Christianity Today** under date of December 20, 1963: "I have always regarded the sermon as a vehicle for pastoral care. It should reach the members of the congregation in their daily duties and needs. That is why it has to be practical. For the parish pastor, the substance of his sermon is constantly supplied by his daily work of pastoral counseling. A pastor who has no parish has to search further for his subject. But no sermon should be without pastoral impact on daily life. During the sermon the listener should form resolutions. 'He who does not have a God to thread his needle does not have a God to give him salvation either' wrote Elise Averdieck in her old age. This is the spirit in which a sermon should be preached."

The entire article is an exceedingly wise, thoughtful and relevant essay on preaching. It is still good for us to remember that preaching is the heart and soul of our ministry — the 'viva vox' — the eternal Word made audible by our cracked lips — the voice of the King calling men to a royal dinner — the voice of the Shepherd bringing life and hope to the sheep lost in the desert of time. This is our task.

Perhaps there is some connection between this and the next item which I find at the bottom of a pile of notes. It appeared in **TIME** a few months ago:

A BUSY WEEK AT ST. PELAGIUS

Attacking activity-filled church calendars, the Christian Century recently proposed a "patron of church bulletins", the heretic Pelagius (A.D. ca. 360-420), who believed that man could save himself by his own efforts. Last week these busynesses, selected from Manhattan church bulletins, might have provided an ideal calendar for a mythical St. Pelagius' Church:

Sunday		7:45 p.m., Seminar, "Sexual Behavior and Marital Adjustment"
12 noon, United Nations tour		8 p.m., Bridge Party
6:15 p.m., Fellowship Supper		
Monday		Thursday
5 p.m., Hand Bell Ringers Rehearsal		12 noon, Sewing Group
8 p.m., Talk on Guatemala, sponsored by Women's Society		7:30 p.m., Barbershop Quartet
8:30 p.m., Piano Concert		8 p.m., Ceramics Group
Tuesday		Friday
11 a.m., Pancake Brunch		5:15 p.m., Spiritual Healing
7:30 p.m., Woodworking Group		7 p.m., Photography Society
Wednesday		Saturday
3:30 p.m., Lecture, "The Role of Women in the New India"		8 p.m., Couples' Club
		8:30 p.m., The Church Players present Rodgers and Hart's — A CONNECTICUT YANKEE

* * *

One more backward look at Christmas 1963. It appears that the hue and cry about the commercialization of Christmas (in which we have occasionally joined) has now been taken up by the columnists appearing in our daily press. So, for example, writing on December 16th, Richard Starnes of the New York World Telegram lets go as follows: "My friend, Handles Messiah, the professional pallbearer, was plainly downcast when he trudged into my laboratory one blustery day recently. 'Well, Handles,' I cried with forced good humor that has made me a legend wherever cruise directors meet, 'Why the dejected mien?' 'It is the time of year,' he replied shortly, shying his deer stalker cap at the hat-rack and slumping into a chair: 'This is always a difficult season for me.'

" 'Ground frozen, and all that?' 'Not at all,' he said, scowling at the light-hearted allusion to his melancholy trade, 'It's that infernal composition . . . Every time I hear some oily disk jockey intone that he is about to play Handel's Messiah I start rummaging around for my chess board . . . The worst of all are the children. My impression is that under the baleful influence of television's tasteless hucksters, today's children have been converted into rapacious little monsters. They look upon Christmas as an open season for predatory foraging. They are as materialistic as the most grasping skinflints since Scrooge. I am afraid few are really aware of what Christmas is supposed to mean. Artificial trees that fold up like umbrellas, forsooth! Some vodka-soaked nightclub singer sawing away at 'Rudolph, the Red Nosed Reindeer' instead of childish voices raised in 'Silent Night.' " . . . and so on . . .

* * *

NOW TO OTHER MATTERS: I have had a number of letters during the past several months from brethren who are disturbed by reports that we are teaching evolution on campus. These have not been nut letters from critics who are looking for some reason to withhold their support from the University; they have come from good, long-time friends who want to be for us all the way, but not at the expense of conscience. And they do not question the necessity of teaching evolution as a theory almost universally held by scientists. They are concerned that we may be teaching evolution as factual truth, in opposition to what they believe the Scriptures say about the facts of creation.

I must confess that I do not quite know how to answer these brethren. Most of us who were trained in the Synodical system find it hard to understand the thought-patterns in which the scientist operates. We instinctively ask of any idea: Is it true? But if I understand the scientist rightly, he is content to ask of any theory or hypothesis: Does it provide a good, rational explanation of the facts that we have been able to assemble up to this point? Does it allow us to make predictions from these facts? Does it, in other words, work? If I understand the import of these questions correctly, the scientist is saying that questions of ultimate truth belong to the theologian, the philosopher, and the metaphysician, whose answers to specific questions may be "truer" than those of the scientist, but are not verifiable by scientific methods. For the scientist, therefore, the theory of evolution may be true without

necessarily being a factual account of what happened; that is, true in the sense that there is no more rational way of explaining such observed facts as fossils, the succession of rock layers in particular places, apparent similarities among the body structures of the animals, and evidences of a very long process of decay of radioactive materials in the earth.

I suspect that one reason why I, and many others who come out of the prep school and seminary background, have trouble understanding the scientist is that this word "evolution" has been running in bad company for a long time. Genesis itself speaks of a process of sequential creation extending over a period of six days, and it even speaks of the Creator using one created thing to bring forth other creatures ("Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven"). So there is a sense in which we have to say that Genesis teaches an evolutionary creation. But Huxley and others muddled the meaning of an otherwise good word by associating it with a whole constellation of purely personal, pseudo-philosophical, non-scientific notions of their own, many of them atheistic or agnostic in origin. I would find it very difficult, therefore, to fault any brother who bristles when he hears the word "evolution"; it has been used to cover a multitude of concepts, some of which are clearly hostile to any Christian understanding of the meaning of Genesis.

Our men have tried to rescue this otherwise decent word from its bad associations by speaking of "theistic evolution." Apparently the adjective is not strong enough to rescue the noun. But the concept is one which we might look at more closely before we decide to accept it or reject it. (Perhaps, as a matter of fact, we need do neither, unless we happen to be called to a scientific vocation.) Some of the men on our campus have suggested that a better term would be "sequential creation," that is, the orderly appearance of created things according to the eternal plan of God and in obedience to His laws. I find the suggestion an attractive one, because it seems to establish a direct line between "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" and "I believe that God has made me and all creatures." But apparently the word "creation" is as much a red flag to many scientists as "evolution" is to many of us.

So a number of us are meeting regularly to see whether we can come up with some short, accurate statement of what is actually being taught on our campus — a statement which, if we can ever get it down on paper, will say that our men are doing a completely honest job as scientists without in any way questioning or defying the authority of Scripture. Meanwhile, they are sending out year by year into the church and the world "living epistles" in the form of young men and women who, having heard the best that science has to say about the history of man and the universe, are able to join the simplest, most unlettered Christian in confessing, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." You probably have some of these young people in your congregation. They are probably among your most faithful and dedicated members.

* * *

University News: In a few weeks we shall have to say farewell to Vice President O. W. Toelke, who has accepted a call as the first Executive Secretary of the new Ohio District. It will be hard to see him go. For five critical years he has handled a most difficult job with energy and dignity. If you ever tire of the financial pressures in your parish, think of him as the man who had to get a million dollars each year to keep us at the University alive. I do not know of any other position in Synod which requires greater faith and dedication, more strength to carry disappointments, and more insistent faith in the future. Pastor Toelke brought to his task both the energy of youth and the seasoned feel of the possible which was the result of a great love for his Church. We shall miss him here. Prayerfully we commend him to the benediction of the Lord of the Church and wish him many more years of dedicated service in the Kingdom . . .

But the work must go on. At this point you may hear the faint rattle of a tin cup as I realize that the annual collection for Valpo is again coming over the hill. This represents very much of our life blood. After all these years I am still dismayed over the fact that so many of our friends are not always aware of our financial problems. In essence, of course, they are very simple. Tuitions and fees — the amount parents give us to have a child attend the University — still amount only to 65% of the total income we must have. Thirty-five cents of every dollar must come from someone who believes in education under the Cross and is willing to give us that much in the hope that we shall be able to give back to the Church of tomorrow a certain number of men and women who will be spiritually sound, intellectually able, and shiningly loyal to the Church which has given them so much.

We are really not asking very much — the crumbs from the synodical table — one to two percent of the money that goes beyond the physical boundaries of your parish — a dollar a year per communi-

cant member — about half as much as I gave our boy for a date last night. With that we can, by the mercy of God, build a great institution. And all this is not just another charity; it is a sound investment in the future.

This story must, however, end on a note of warm gratitude. For almost four decades our brethren — from coast to coast — have kept us going and growing. They have not let us down. Only yesterday I received a note from a good brother in western Canada enclosing his personal check for ten dollars. I have been around Synod long enough to know that salaries up there are not excessive. This kind of lift is far more than financial. Suddenly two thousand years drop away, and I seem to be watching the widow at the temple gate with her pennies . . .

One more word: During the past four months I have been wandering around Synod even more than normally. Everywhere I heard the same story — the enormous financial pressures on the brother in the parish — a spiraling inflationary economy — building programs — Synod's ever greater needs throughout our planet — all these descend on brother Gottlieb like dark, heavy clouds. Last week when I spoke at a small mission congregation I was astounded at the budget two hundred members were carrying.

But, Brother, let there be no mistake about it. This is our own peculiar, particular twentieth century burden. Other generations under other shepherds were called to share the suffering and poverty of their people. We in this apocalyptic hour are asked to share in the temptation of riches, the affluence of our members, to offset the dread, deadening downward pull of "Gammon" — the curious idol, God and Mammon, which twentieth century men have built for themselves. And so, as another year of our Lord — always a good thing to remember — dawns, a note of gratitude to the brother who has helped us these forty years, and a word of sympathy to the young brother who wrote last month: "I want to talk about God on Sunday morning, but how can I do that when we are so far behind in our budget?" Obvious advice: "Stay with God. Finally He, and He alone, can open hearts and purses — and the purse will always follow only the heart . . ."

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Now away from all this. Lent comes early this year, and I thought you might want to sit back and meditate for a few moments. Last night I idly paged through Bainton's translation of "Luther's Meditations on the Gospels." Here is real meat. A paragraph or two: "Today is Passion Sunday. It is good once a year to read through the whole story of the Passion. If I go for two days without thinking of Christ I become faint and sluggish. What, then, would become of those who for a year at a time do not hear of Him?"

"Yet even those who hear the word are not awakened. The Passion of Christ has been read, sung, and preached, but to what end? One may say that it is both proclaimed and hidden. Few of those who would gladly hear reflect upon its meaning. They go to church, listen to the recital of the Passion, and as they came in, so they go out. They are delighted to hear that Christ our Lord shed His blood for us, but should we tell them not to covet, to grasp, to fornicate — then the whole Rhine would be ablaze."

Or a comment on the first word from the Cross: "Who can express such love? His heart was so full of the fire of love that no one can comprehend. In pain and shame He acted as though He felt them not and was thinking only of our sin and God's wrath. Is that not love? He burned and writhed beneath the weight, the spear, the blood, the wounds, and yet He said: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Here is a loveliness that only the eyes of the spirit can discern. He was esteemed a robber, a rascal, a reprobate above all reprobates, yet in the heart He was fairer than the sun."

* * *

Footnote to Death: Over the span of many years I have learned that the hour from seven to eight in the morning is the best time to read. The looming cares of the day have not yet appeared, and one is able to read fast and hard. This hour, therefore, finds me in the kitchen with a cup of coffee, trying to discover how many inane things this week's journals are saying. One other thing I have also learned. If the telephone on the wall rings before eight o'clock, it is always bad news, and almost always the echo of the rustling of the wings of the angels of death.

It happened again this morning: At 7:40 the phone rang: "Fred Wehrenberg died on Christmas Eve. The funeral will be Saturday at 2:00 p.m." I hung up the phone and returned to my chair; but the SATURDAY REVIEW was no longer interesting. I found myself staring at the clock on the wall.

For, with the passing of Fred Wehrenberg of Fort Wayne, the University had not only lost a tremendous supporter and a Board member, but I had also lost a great and good friend. Fred was one of those laymen that only the Missouri Synod can really produce, ecclesiastically intelligent (how he would have laughed at that characterization), profoundly loyal, reverently critical and critically reverent, a critic and friend of preachers, totally honest, unknowingly unselfish, a true Israelite, a reverent child of God with an irreverent sense of humor. He will now become a legend very quickly. There are some like him left on our University Boards — Gallmeyer, Dickmeyer, Meier, Boehne, Sauerman, Amling — but not many, because they reach far back into the past of the Missouri Synod. They are the laymen whom our fathers in God produced with good schools, good CHRISTENLEHRE, and excellent pastoral care. We in our time do not make them any more.

So Fred has momentarily gone before us. If Heaven is what I think it is, his arrival must have created quite a stir. Perhaps even at this moment the cherubim and seraphim off-duty are gathered round to hear him tell a Missouri Synod story. I am sure that he is very happy. For, in a strange and heavenly way, he will fit into their company very well indeed.

* * *

Odds and Ends: You may remember that last summer I said a few words about "the right to criticize." I tried to point out that we — all of us — must earn the right to criticize — and that this can be done only by devoted successful work for the church as measured by souls won, and so on. Comes now a brother who is pastor of an inner city parish who objects violently. He says that his situation cannot be judged by ordinary standards.

He is, of course, absolutely right. The brother who is fighting a losing battle against impossible odds was farthest from my mind. I have seen such situations at first hand and I know something of the break they can bring to a pastoral heart. Only a few days ago I sat with a young brother who had such a call. Souls are down from 1300 to 700 — all leading members are moving to the suburbs — only a handful of faithful souls in a church on Sunday morning that seats 1000 — and so on. No, no, this is not the brother I was talking about. He is, in my book, a saint and a hero, a frontier fighter who deserves only our deepest respect and affection.

Sometimes I wonder if we are always aware of the shattering changes that have come over our world in the past fifty years. Recently I saw a statement by Dr. Wernher von Braun who said that all of man's technological knowledge since the beginning of time doubled between the years 1750 and 1900. This amount of technological knowledge again doubled between 1900 and 1950 and repeated the process between 1950 and 1960. He predicted that the amount of such knowledge would again double between 1960 and 1967 . . . Please note thoughtfully the speed with which that calendar is changing. Somewhere else I saw the statement that 90% of all scientists who ever lived are living today . . . This may also fit: The population of the world is increasing by 7000 an hour — most of it in non-white countries. A recent issue of **The Lutheran Standard** publishes some additional statistics which are almost frightening: "If we compress the present population of the world, now over two and one-half billion, into a group of a thousand persons living in a single town the following is the picture of contrasts we would then vividly see: Sixty persons out of one thousand would be American. These sixty Americans would own half the wealth. Seventy of the one thousand would be Protestants. Nine hundred and forty non-Americans would always be hungry. The sixty Americans would have an average life expectancy of seventy years; all the other nine hundred and forty would average under forty. Eighty persons in the whole town would be believing Communists (more than the Protestants) and three hundred and seventy would be under Communist domination. Thirty-six would be members of the Christian Church. Literally most of the non-American people in the town would be poor, hungry, sick and ignorant. Almost half of them would not be able to read or write."

Well, there it is. What can we do but work like slaves, like driven men, begging Deacon Sauerbraten and Grandmother Himmelhoch to see the picture — the searing, tearing agony of our world — and to bring our Lord Christ into it however we can?

* * *

And now another word for Lent: Many years ago an English professor called my attention to the stunning, dramatic intensity of the story in the Gospels which begins at six o'clock on Thursday evening and ends at three o'clock on Friday afternoon. Here were 21 hours of life in an obscure corner of the world. They ended in seeming defeat as a young man died on a cross on a spring afternoon. And yet: 700,000 days have passed since that spring afternoon, and of these 700,000 there has not been a

single one in which somebody would not have died for Him. Even purely historically it is a most remarkable and unique phenomenon of history. It introduces the deep diapason of God into time.

Everyone is aware of the change in our spiritual and intellectual climate during the past thirty years. Many of our own generation have seen the cross in human history and turn with new faith and hope to the original Cross to catch its meaning, to establish its relevance and to evaluate its power for the modern mind and temper. Certainly it presents the mind of the twentieth century man with a tremendous either-or: either it has final meaning for life and history or we can pass it by to turn to our immediate concerns, our momentary problems and our slavery to the temporal and the material.

Often the words of the story are strange and mysterious beyond all imagining. Have you ever looked closely at His words in Matthew 26:40: "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" If we listen to these words as Christians we know and believe that the young man who spoke them under the Paschal moon was very God of Very God, Begotten, not Made, being of one substance with the Father from all eternity. He was the God-man for whose summons the uncalled legions of angels were waiting. He was the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the great I Am that I Am, the Son of the Living God in a foreign land.

What does He say? Something so wistfully and sorrowfully human that it is almost beyond understanding — something that we have said to a friend from a sick bed or in an hour of deep loneliness and great trouble: "Could ye not watch with me one hour? Can't you stay and help me through these dark waters? Won't you keep me company in my loneliness?" And here now in one swift lightning moment in the darkness of the Garden we catch a glimpse of the wistfulness of Jesus Christ — the great mysterious loneliness of the Son of God. This is not God flinging His compassion from aeons away on us who must live and die alone in the dusk of the earth. This is God as one of us, in the very heat and very pain of life. This is God, not with drums beating and flags flying, but lonely and alone in the darkness under the trees of the Garden.

Perhaps these are the words which must come to us as the Lenten season of 1964 dawns: "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" To watch with Him and then to report on what we have learned in our watching is our great and compelling task.

May God give you strength and joy in it.

Faithfully yours

O.P. Kretzmann